

# アジア人英語アクセントに対する態度: アングロ系アメリカ人大学生に対する調査から

## Attitudes toward Accents of Asian English: A Survey of Anglo-American College Students

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### Abstract

This study investigated Anglo-American college students' attitudes toward Japanese-, Chinese-, and Indian-accented English. American and Australian English accents were included for comparison purposes. Participants heard the speech samples of the accents and were asked to evaluate aspects of the accent such as clarity and fluency. They were also asked their impressions of the speakers' countries with the exception of the United States. The participants were asked to describe the four countries by using five adjectives. The findings indicated that the participants rated the native speakers' accents generally more favorably than the Asian speakers'. Furthermore, the participants had positive stereotypes of Japan and Australia; on the other hand, national stereotypes of China and India were mostly negative. We also found the attitudes toward accents were partly related to the participants' stereotypes of the Asian countries.

### Introduction

English is now recognized as an international language because of the number of speakers and its usefulness. Hence, as more people use English as a second or foreign language, more varieties of non-native English accents will be produced. These non-native accents of English can affect people's attitudes toward not only the accents themselves but the speakers who produce the accents as well. Hudson (1980) states,

"People use the speech of others as a clue to non-linguistic information about them, such as their social background and even personality

traits like toughness or intelligence."(p.202)

In sociolinguistics, such people's attitudes toward language variation are categorized as "language attitudes." For the investigation of language attitudes, Lambert *et al.* (1960) developed the 'matched-guise' technique. An experiment using this technique asks listeners to judge two or more varieties of tape-recorded speech samples. The listeners' judgments are considered to represent stereotyped reactions to the given language varieties and stereotyped reactions to the speakers who produce the accents as well.

Based on the 1960 study of Lambert *et al.*,

some researchers developed modifications of the matched-guise technique (e.g., Cooper, 1975) and investigated people's attitudes toward non-native speakers' English accents.

Chiba *et al.* (1995) examined Japanese college students' attitudes toward various English accents. In their study, four non-native English accents –Japanese, Cantonese (Hong Kong), Sri Lankan, Malaysian– and two native English accents (British and American English) were examined. The Japanese university students rated the two native English accents more favorably than the Asian-accented English. Forde (1995) investigated elementary students' attitudes toward varieties of English accents in Hong Kong. He found that Standard American and Standard British (RP) were the most favorable accents.

Because of historical and geographic circumstances, in European countries the Standard British accent is positively recognized as their model of English pronunciation. Furthermore, Standard American is positively judged because of familiarity with American culture such as music and movies (see Dalton-Puffer *et al.*, 1997; Ladegaard, 1998).

Alford & Strother (1990) examined the language attitudes of native speakers and non-native speakers of English. According to their study, the language attitudes of native English speakers were different from those of non-native speakers. They also assumed that non-native speakers of English focus primarily on pronunciation in their language judgments, while native speakers' language judgments are influenced by cultural stereotypes.

Cargile (1997) investigated Anglo and Asian undergraduate students' attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese-accented English. In his study,

Chinese-accented English was examined in two different contexts: a job interview and a college classroom. The findings indicated that many of the subjects did not have negative attitudes toward Chinese-accented English in a job interview. On the other hand, many of them had negative attitudes toward Chinese-accented English in an academic setting.

In the United States, the number of legal immigrants from Asian countries has recently increased. The number of immigrants was 219,700 in 1998 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In addition, non-immigrant Asian students are now the largest foreign student group in the United States, with 308,000 students in 1998 (US Census Bureau, 2000). Therefore, problems that Asian people in the US face are becoming more salient. Lippi-Green (1997) points out that discrimination against Asian people based on their accented English surely exists in the US society.

Because accents may be a basis for discrimination, it becomes important to identify Americans' attitudes toward English accents of Asian people. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to examine the attitudes Anglo-American college students have toward English accents of Asians. What language attitudes do Anglo-Americans have, and what cultural stereotypes of Asian countries do they hold?

## Method

The participants in this study were 27 Anglo-American college students enrolled in a linguistics class at a university in Michigan. The great majority of the participants were first-semester seniors whose average age was 21. English accents of three Asian speakers –Japanese, Chinese, and Indian– were used in this

study. Two native English speakers –American and Australian– were included for comparison purposes. The speakers were carefully selected considering voice qualities. All of the speakers were university-educated males. The method of the present study was a modified matched -guise – the ‘verbal guise’ (see Cooper, 1975). The speakers read and recorded a passage of about one minute in length (Appendix A). The participants listened to these recordings and then answered the two questionnaires. No information about the speakers was given to the participants. Questionnaire A (Appendix B) asked the participants to rate the English accents using ten adjective pairs (the adjectives were from Chiba *et al.*, 1995). After rating each speaker’s accent, the participants were asked to guess the speaker’s nationality.

In the second questionnaire (Appendix C), the participants were asked their impressions of the speakers’ countries, with the exception of the United States. The participants were asked to describe the four countries by writing as many as five adjectives. Finally, the participants were asked demographic questions. The questionnaires were cross-indexed so that pairs from the same respondent could be identified.

### Results and Discussion

The participants produced evaluative reactions using the ten adjective pairs on a scale ranging from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive). Table 1 shows

total mean scores for the individual speakers. Overall, the participants judged the native speakers more favorably than the Asians. This is clearly indicated by the difference between the American and the Indian because of the statistical significance ( $t = 4.59, p < .001$ ). The participants’ responses for the Indian and the Chinese were not much different. However, the participants judged the Japanese speaker less positively than the other Asian accents. The difference between the Chinese and the Japanese was significant ( $t = 4.43, p < .001$ ). Since the speakers’ nationalities were not disclosed during the experiment, recognizing how the participants identified the speakers could play an important role in understanding the participants’ stereotypes based on accents. The identifications of the speakers are shown in Table 2.

Both the native English speakers’ nationalities were successfully identified by most the participants (American; Australian,  $n = 25, 92.6\%$ ). Many of the participants identified the Indian (Indian:  $n = 20, 74.1\%$ ). In contrast, half of the participants identified Chinese as Japanese ( $n = 14, 51.9\%$ ); about 40 % of the participants identified Japanese as Chinese. Identifying the native speakers was the easiest, and identifying the Indian was the second. The participants were less able to identify the difference between the Chinese and the Japanese. Therefore, from these results it can be said that the participants rated both the Australian and the American

**Table 1.** Means of total scores, standard deviations for the individual speakers, and t-values

Speaker	4. AUS	2. USA	5. IND	1. CHN	3. JPN
Mean	41.68	41.55	33.96	33.31	25.79
SD	4.42	5.51	6.58	5.18	7.12
t-value	0.95	4.59 ***	0.40	4.43 ***	

t-values are calculated by independent t-test for two independent samples

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

accents while recognizing their national origins. The same might be said for the Indian. Many of the participants rated the Chinese accent while attributing it to a Japanese speaker. Many of them also had negative attitudes toward the Japanese accent while not identifying the speaker as Japanese.

The participants were asked their impressions of the speakers' countries with the exception of the United States. The purpose of this question was to identify the Anglo-American students' stereotypes of the speakers' origins. Since national stereotypes tend to be based on the recognition of cultural differences, we recognize national stereotypes as cultural stereotypes in the present study. Table 3 shows the total number of adjectives and the number of positive adjectives written for each country. The totals in particular may imply the participants' familiarity with the speakers' countries, and the positive adjectives show the tendency of

stereotypes of the countries. In short, more positive adjectives show positive stereotypes; less positive adjectives mean negative stereotypes.

Table 3 shows the participants' familiarity with the speakers' countries indicated by the number of adjectives and their stereotypes of the countries. Some examples are shown in Appendix D. The participants provided the most adjectives for Japan, and 73% of the adjectives were positive. Similarly, 70% of adjectives used to describe Australia were positive. It is interesting that for Japan we see such positive adjectives as "industrialized," "technological," and "intelligent." These descriptions might be a result of products Japanese companies make, such as cars, TV sets, and cameras. We may assume that Americans are familiar with products "made in Japan." In contrast, the participants' stereotypes of Australia included "laid-back" and "easy-going."

**Table 2.** Identification of the speaker's nationality

Correct Nationality	Guessed Nationality				
	1. CHN	2. USA	3. JPN	4. AUS	5. IND
1. CHN	9 (33.3)*	0 (0.0)	11 (40.7)	1 (3.7)	2 (7.4)
2. USA	0 (0.0)	25 (92.6)*	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
3. JPN	14 (51.9)	1 (3.7)	6 (22.2)*	0 (0.0)	5 (18.5)
4. AUS	0 (0.0)	1 (3.7)	0 (0.0)	25 (92.6)*	0 (0.0)
5. IND	4 (14.8)	0 (0.0)	10 (37.0)	1 (3.7)	20 (74.1)*

\* Asterisks indicates the number and percentage ( ) of subjects who correctly guessed nationalities

**Table 3.** The participants' familiarity and positive stereotypes of the speakers' countries indicated by the number of adjectives

	Total number of adjectives	Means for total adjectives	Total number of positive adjectives	Means for positive adjectives	The ratio of the positive adjectives in the total adjectives
Japan	105	3.8	77	2.8	73%
Australia	85	3.1	60	2.2	70%
China	85	3.1	38	1.4	44%
India	67	2.4	24	0.8	35%

Ladegaard (1998) found that the national stereotypes of Australia are related to the Crocodile Dundee-movies and the image of the laid-back, easy-going Aussie even though the judges in his study were non-native speakers of English. He concluded that the stereotypes may be “subconscious information” transmitted by the media.

On the other hand, the participants wrote much less positive adjectives about China and India. We found the following examples like “smart” and “intelligent” as positive adjectives, while we also found “poor” and “dirty” for both the countries. The participants’ stereotypes of Japan and Australia seem positive; on the other hand, they had negative stereotypes of China and India.

## Conclusion

Interesting results were found with regard to the participants’ attitudes toward the accents of Asian English and stereotypes of the speakers’ countries. Typical attitudes toward accents of native speakers of English and those of non-native speakers were found. Native English accents were more positively rated than the Asian accents; this result can support the uniform evaluation pattern across many contexts, which the previous studies revealed. The participants’ attitudes toward the Asian accents were different; the Chinese and Indian accents were more positively rated than the Japanese one.

However, this raised a question. In the identification of the speakers, about 80% of the participants guessed the Japanese speaker was not Japanese, and identified the speaker as either Chinese or Indian. Moreover, many of the participants held negative national stereotypes of China and India. We may therefore assume that

negative national stereotypes of China and India partly affected the participants’ attitudes toward the Japanese accent, which was the least positively rated.

However, whether or not cultural or national stereotypes can affect listeners’ language judgments should be intensively examined under appropriate conditions. For this it may be good to examine the difference of language attitudes between nationality-informed participants and non-informed participants. Intensive statistical analysis, moreover, should be required in order to fully explore the relationship between language attitudes and national stereotypes. Finally, it is essential that the experiment have larger samples so that we can obtain the more reliable results.

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## Appendix A

### Script

Besides dangerous situations, many other things can cause stress. Among the more common causes of stress are such different things as thirst, hunger, and sleepiness; school; relationships; and change. Yesterday, Dean and his friends hiked all afternoon. By the end of the hike, Dean was very thirsty. He felt very warm and all he could think about was drinking a glass of cold water. Thirst is the body's way of making sure body tissues get the right amount of water. That is, the stress caused by thirst encourages you to drink the water your body needs. In addition to thirst, hunger and sleepiness can cause stress. The stress caused by hunger and

sleepiness also encourages you to do what is needed to stay alive and well—that is, eat and sleep.

## Appendix B

### Questionnaire A

clear	5	4	3	2	1	unclear
without accent	5	4	3	2	1	with accent
confident	5	4	3	2	1	unconfident
friendly	5	4	3	2	1	unfriendly
elegant	5	4	3	2	1	not elegant
fluent	5	4	3	2	1	not fluent
skilled	5	4	3	2	1	unskilled
intelligent	5	4	3	2	1	unintelligent
sophisticated	5	4	3	2	1	not sophisticated
careful	5	4	3	2	1	not careful
Which country do you think this speaker comes from?						
China	Japan	U.S.A	India	Australia		

## Appendix C

### Questionnaire B

1. Please describe your impression of the following countries by 5 adjectives.

Japan:

China:

India:

Australia:

### Personal and Background Information

2. Sex: male female

3. Age: 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25  
other ( )

4. You are: Freshman Sophomore Junior  
Senior

## Appendix D

Examples of stereotypes of the speakers' countries

	Positive	Negative
Japan	polite, intelligent, industrialized, very cultured, technological, educated, smart, rich, organized, intellectual, sophisticated, democratic, wealthy, confident, friendly, technological, advanced, artistic, mature, happy	crowded, overpopulated
Australia	outdoorsy, romantic, industrialized, beautiful, modern, easygoing, friendly, educated, intelligent, civilized, democratic, wealthy, smart, polite, nature oriented, fun, laid-back	* The students did not write negative adjectives.
China	industrialized, high-tech, well educated, cultured, intelligent, friendly, educationally superior, beautiful, smart, traditional, intellectual, established, proud, polite	violators of human right, crowded, unclear, unskilled, not confident, unintelligent, poor, over-crowded, difficult, unpleasant, non-industrialized, dirty, non-democratic, overpopulated, low income, overworked, pushy, harsh, repressive
India	intelligent, industrial, beautiful, traditional, intellectual, smart, culturally rich, educated	overpopulated, uneducated, 3 rd world, poor, dirty, poverty- stricken, economically poor, unfriendly, unrest, harsh, insincere